DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 510 EA 002 107

By-Roaden, Arliss L.

The Assessment of School Performance in Big City School Systems.

Pub Date Feb 69

Note-16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Amer. Educ. Res. Assn. (Los Angeles, Calif., Feb. 5-8, 1969).

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.90

Descriptors-Academic Achievement, *Academic Performance, Achievement Tests, City Problems, *Evaluation, Evaluation Methods, *Methodology, Public Opinion, *School Surveys, *Urban Schools

Identifiers-Cincinnati, Columbus, Detroit, District of Columbia, Washington

Data and comment are presented on the methodologies of four recent studies which assessed school performance in cities experiencing unrest and conflict (Cincinnati, Columbus, Detroit, and Washington, D.C.). The topics of primary concern are (1) the school performance objectives that were assessed, (2) the methods and tools used by the investigators of the city systems in their assessment, (3) the conclusions reached about school performance and the recommendations offered for effecting improvements, and (4) specific recommendations made on how city school systems might develop capabilities for continuous self-assessment. The four school systems studied relied heavily on standardized tests to assess school performance. One of the major problems concerned the release of the test results to the public. It is concluded that, in spite of remediation programs, students from poor families are still likely to achieve poorly. (HW)

ED 028 013

THE ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN BIG CITY SCHOOL SYSTEMS*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

By Arliss L. Roaden
The Ohio State University

The focus of this paper is on methodology for studying one component of big city school systems -- "assessment of school performance." "How well are the schools doing?" This question is one that is raised repeatedly by parents and other interested, often anxious, citizens. The question is raised honestly and humbly, but generally with little knowledge of the complexities of answering the question -- complexities due to the diversified nature of the institution and of the school enterprise; complexities because of ambiguity about school objectives; complexities about social and intra-system norms against which assessment is to be made; and complexities because school officials and other professionals usually don't have an adequate base of information with which to answer the question.

The data presented here were drawn from recent studies of four big cities: Cincinnati, Ohio[1]; Columbus, Ohio[2]; Detroit, Michigan[3]; and Washington, D.C.[4]

Primarily, questions dealt with in this paper are: (1) What school system objectives were delineated for purposes of assessing performance? (2) What did investigators of the city systems look for, and what tools did they use to assess school performance? (3) What conclusions were reached about school

EA 002 107

---

* This paper was prepared for a symposium "The Study of Big City School Systems: A Comparative Analysis" at the February, 1969 Convention of the American Educational Research Association, Los Angeles, California.

performance, and what recommendations were offered for effecting improvements? And (4) What specific recommendations were made about how city school systems might develop capabilities for continuous self-assessment?

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Rarely are school studies called for except in a context of unrest and conflict. In Cincinnati, the study followed failure of two public school referenda; Columbus citizens were anxious about intra-system equality of educational opportunity, and what they perceived to be less than adequate responsiveness of school officials to their questions; the Detroit study followed student refusal to attend classes, protesting what they considered to be inferior educational opportunity and less than adequate response of school administrators; and the "track system" and public dissatisfaction with the academic performance of school children preceded the school study in Washington, D.C.

In such a climate of unrest, professionals associated with school studies are torn between their desire to conduct a study of scientific rigor and respectability, and one which has built-in capabilities for effecting rapid change. Both, I think, are possible and essential. To ignore the potential for gathering data for making generalizable recommendations is less that optimum professional responsibility; yet to ignore social climate in any school study is to overlook a set of crucial variables.

When citizens ask about how well the schools are doing, what do they mean? It is doubtful that they have in mind the full range of school system performance measures which would assess input in terms of fiscal and human

resources, assess output in terms of a more satisfied and productive society or accelerated economy, and which would evaluate all components of the teaching-learning processes that transpire between input and output. Usually they mean, "How well are students achieving academically in relation to achievements of other students in the same classroom in another school, throughout the system, or throughout the Country."

In this paper, I have confined my discussion to pupil performance. The temptation is great in a school study to focus on a wide range of organizational, financial, personnel, instructional, and contextual variables that are essentially treatments, but which influence pupil performance. All of these are vital to the extent that they can be restructured or manipulated to affect improved performance of pupils.

Performance objectives are not always clearly stated, nor is there widespread agreement about what they should be. Study teams that pre-determine performance objectives frequently find that the system being examined may not have explicated its objectives, or its objectives may be different or be ordered differently from those of the study team. A more likely problem is the absense of data with which to assess important objectives.

One task force of the Columbus Study team addressed itself to seeking answers to the questions, "How well are Columbus young people prepared for further schooling, employment, and community life?" This question, pertaining only to pupil preparation, was one of four major questions posed. The Washington, D.C. team noted that the long range goal is not simply one of bringing children up to grade-level in reading; but, quoting John H. Fischer, "... to provide

schools that will assure every child an equal chance to use his talents to live effectively and to compete on fair terms in an open society." There are important educational objectives other than reading and mathematics achievement, the Washington team observed, but the schools are found with little data. These objectives are self-concept, ego-development, values, attitudes, aspirations, and other "non-academic", but important aspects of individual growth. Also, they noted, little is known about how schools are helping youngsters learn how to live and earn a living in a city.

The Detroit team cautioned that citizens will no longer accept the fact that a school is at or near city-wide averages on standardized achievements tests, particularly at a time when city-wide averages are below national levels. And the Cincinnati team concluded that the most serious problem facing the Cincinnati School System at this time is the presence of large numbers of children who are achieving at standards well below those which are necessary for success in later schooling or in vocational life.

Academic achievement as an important school objective cannot be denied. Parents have a right to expect professional expertise from the schools, and they have a right to demand positive results. The right to read, although not listed in "The Bill of Rights," is among the most important of guaranteed rights to citizens. Beyond academic achievement, other objectives of the schools are not as clear. John Gardner once observed that education is "the servant of all our purposes." Beyond that statement, there is little left. The great test of schools today is their capacity to deliver for those whose social and economic station in life leave them no alternative but to depend on the schools

for equality of access to opportunities open to other citizens, but closed to them. There is nothing productive to be gained by protesting the severity of that burden which has been placed on the schools. The burden is still there, and problems of coping with the challenges must be faced directly, and shared openly and freely with all citizens.

METHODS AND TOOLS FOR ASSESSING PERFORMANCE

The methods and tools employed by study teams frequently tell more about performance objectives that are deemed important than do statements of objectives. Restraints on Study process are always present, the most common one being time[5]; others are fiscal resources, manpower, and judgments about what information is most critical at the moment.[6]

COLUMBUS

The Columbus team analysed all available scores of tests, administered in 1967-68. These included reading readiness for grade one; I.Q., reading achievement (word meaning and paragraph meaning), and arithmetic achievement for grade six; I.Q., reading achievement and arithmetic achievement for grade eight; and reading achievement for grade nine.

Each set of test scores for each grade level was graphed to show variance among six categories of socio-economic status. (In the report these SES categories are identified as priority one, priority two, etc.) A graph was prepared to report by SES category, reading achievement at grade one, grade six and grade nine. The purpose here was to depict the extent to which reading

skills were sustained across the grades for each SES priority level.

To assess factors other than achievement, the study team collected data from some 12,000 students to ascertain their perceptions, attitudes, and morale with respect to their school experiences. These included an open-end questionnaire whereby high school seniors responded to the following topics: (1) going to school with children of different races; (2) going to another school (in the suburbs or in the inner city) for all or part of my studies; (3) the counselors here; (4) feelings of people in my neighborhood about this school and the kind of education you get here. Morale with regard to a range of school experiences was tested in grades four, six, eight and ten. For grades nine and twelve, there were measures of authoritarianism, educational alienation, fatalism, general achievement motivation, self-concept, school achievement, motivation, and social desirability. All of the above measures were compared across SES categories.

The team interviewed school drop-outs and other unemployed youths to get their views about their own school experiences, and the team studied performance of Columbus high school graduates during their freshman year at college. Also, data were collected from employers about how well the system's products were equipped for work.

CINCINNATI

The Cincinnati team analysed achievement test scores in reading, language, and arithmetic for grades two, four, five and eight, and they reported grade-level equivalencies for the first quartile, the median, and the third quartile for each grade level.

One comparison was made of the sixth grade I.Q. mean score in 1957 with the sixth grade mean score in 1967.

Enrollment in each of the three "tracks" for grades 7-12 was reported, noting disproportionate enrollment by race in each of the tracks.

The team analysed and reported test results from evaluative studies of compensatory education in target elementary schools.

The school holding power between grade seven and grade twelve (percentage of grade seven enrollment who enrolled for grade twelve, five years later) was studied and reported.

DETROIT

The Detroit study differed from the others in that the team's mission was to look only at the high schools, whereas the other three studies were of all grade levels.

The Detroit team analysed for each high school, scores of scholastic aptitude (SCAT) and educational progress (STEP); and the number of STANINES in the lower 25 per cent and in the upper 25 per cent were reported for each high school. The team arranged to have the Cooperative English Test administered to all tenth and twelfth grade students in the English classes. The purpose of that study was to ascertain the extent of ability grouping across classes. Stated school policies were to group within classes rather than across classes; however, the team suspected that the latter was the case, operationally.

The team administered an instrument to assess the extent of alienation in the student body. Alienation scores were reported in relation to effects on the scores of several variables: race, sex, socio-economic status, grade level,

and grade point average.

Other matters related to school performance which the Detroit team studied were (1) attendance patterns, (2) tardiness patterns, (3) school holding effectiveness between grades ten and twelve, (4) school policies on grading, (5) school policies on discipline, (6) rate of student failure by school and by subject, (7) honors and scholarships, and (8) performance of graduates in college.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

The Washington, D.C. team conducted a study of pupil performance on standardized tests in a sample of 47 schools.

The SCAT and STEP (reading and mathematics) scores for grade eleven students in eleven high schools were reported along with number of pupils, per cent of Negro pupils, number of teachers, and per cent of Negro teachers in each of the schools. A similar set of data was reported for eleventh graders in eleven junior high schools. For sixth graders in 25 schools, these same data were reported along with three SES characteristics of each neighborhood.

The percentage of five sample Washington groups who scored at or above national percentiles on the STEP reading, STEP mathematics, and SCAT test was reported for each of the following: fourth grade, sixth grade, ninth grade (general track), eleventh grade (regular track) and eleventh grade (vocational high school).

Another pilot study of second graders in three schools was conducted by the team to see if the school system had been successful in identifying students who were in need of special educational programs.

Other relevant factors studied and reported by the Washington team were:

(1) post high school activities of the 1966 graduates, (2) location and types of higher education institutions attended by the 1966 graduates, (3) employers and types of employment of 1966 graduates and (4) patterns of high school holding power.

IMPROVING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The four studies of big city school systems relied heavily on standardized achievements tests to assess school performance. The appropriate usage of tests is a metter of wide-spread concern. School officials have been indecisive about their testing policies, and they have guarded against release of scores to "unauthorized" persons. If professionals are confused about tests, so are parents and other citizens. Recently, there have been heated demands from the public for release of test scores. School systems have been slow to respond for at least two reasons: (1) they fear public misinterpretation of variance in scores across socio-economic sectors of the city, and (2) they frequently do not have scores compiled in any systematic way suitable tor public release. Citizens interpret this reluctance to mean that the scores are low and school officials are "covering up" inadequacies of the school system.

The Columbus and Cincinnati study teams recommended that achievement scores be released to the public. In both cities citizens were asking for public release of test scores. Public support of the schools is unlikely in a context of suspicion that the schools are performing inadequately. The public's "right to know" is an educational principle that needs revitalizing. Parents are becoming more sophisticated about strengths and

weaknesses of tests; and a common concern around which the school and community might work together is improving school performance. The Cincinnati team stated the following with regard to test scores:

> These data (test scores) are useful in bringing about a better public understanding of the nature and magnitude of the task of providing effective and efficient education in Cincinnati. They do not constitute an evaluation of the School system, and any attempt to use them for this purpose would be an over-simplification of the problem. These data should be a matter of public record, because public support of education cannot be expected if the school system does not share with its public the nature and magnitude of the problems it faces."[8]

In most of the studies achievement scores are reported in relation to SES variables; and in some cases, they are reported in relation to race. Their findings reflected lower achievement levels among the economically poor students than was the case for the more affluent students, with variance as high as 3.8 grade levels. Further they noted that black students usually score lower than white students because of overlap of SES and race variables.

I suppose the other study teams went through the same dialogue as did the Columbus team. "Why study the obvious?" There are mountains of achievement date that reflect the same patterns. That team cautioned itself about public credibility of the study unless local data were collected and reported. Their apprehensions were well founded. The Columbus community study reflected that 43 per cent of the citizens did not believe that there were special problems in educating inner city children.

All study teams are, no doubt, perplexed about the extent to which the team itself should conduct studies of school performance, and the extent that it should analyse and report data collected by the school system. Time and resource constraints usually limit extensive studies by the team members beyond those which are deemed essential. On the other hand, few school systems have the research and evaluation capability for furnishing needed information. In a context of public unrest, there is also the problem of confidence in locally supplied data.

On questions regarding student morale, attitudes, perceptions, and the like, study teams have little alternative but to collect the data themselves. Students must be assured that teachers and school officials will not have access to their individual responses. Two of the studies reported here--Columbus and Detroit-- did conduct studies of student morale which included measures of alienation and fatalism. In view of Coleman's conclusion that the variable most highly associated with achievement is the extent to which a student feels he has control over his own destiny, a measure of this and related variables become especially significant.[9]

Unless school systems maintain follow-up data on their graduates and dropouts, study teams are hampered in assessing how well the products of the schools are doing. The Washington team had access to school system reports on employment patterns of its graduates for one year. The Columbus team had no such data, and the team relied on

interviews and questionnaire responses of local employers about how well the students were equipped for employment. Studies of how well graduates do in college are usually not done by school systems in any systematic way. The Washington team reported on performance of students from the district at Howard University; the Detroit team studies performance of local graduates at Wayne State University; and the Columbus team studies performance of local students at Ohio State University. These studies are restrictive, in that performance at local universities is difficult to generalize for likely performance at other universities. The reasons which prompt a student to go to a home-town college or university (such as part-time employment or low motivation) may mitigate against optimal performance.

SCHOOL SYSTEM CAPABILITIES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

City school system officials have become so burdened with day-to-day operations of the schools, problems frequently reach the crisis stage before they can be handled. A capacity for planning, research and evaluation to perceive potential problems before they arise, and to "service" the system for efficiency and effectiveness, is fondly hoped for, but rarely realized in school systems. When the problems mount beyond some undefined level of tolerance, an external agency is frequently called for advice. Possibly the best advice from the agency beyond dealing with immediate crises would be to recommend ways whereby the school system can develop within itself an effective

research and evaluation capability for planning and for operational decision-making.

All of the four studies cited here called attention to this need. The Detroit team expressed concern that tests were being used for negative purposes of ascertaining deficiencies for decisions on grouping, rather than for diagnoses to plan instructional programs.

The Columbus and Cincinnati teams recommended generous support of a division in the central office for research and evaluation. The division should be geared to (1) provide information to the public on how education dollars are spent, (2) provide quality indices on returns from educational investments, (3) evaluate how the school enterprise is performing, (4) generate sound data for operational decision-making at all levels, and (5) train teachers and others in ways to utilize information.

The Washington team, likewise, recommended the establishment of a research and evaluation department which would encompass an existing group measurement division with a new mandate for diagnosis and assessment primarily for instructional and counseling purposes. Also, the team called for a new model of psycholcgical services which would stress educational, rather than clinical diagnoses.

The Columbus team recommended the establishment of "Regional School Assessment Committees" composed of 12 members (three teachers, two students, one principal and six community leaders). Their function would include review of achievement and other test data, react to curriculum change proposals, cousel the schools on community resources,

mediate community school grievances, evaluate disciplinary practices, and related matters. They would meet monthly and report at least annually to the Board of Education, the community, and to building level groups.

Active participation of the community in assessing school performance, and an effective research and evaluation program within the system may be essential for sustaining (in some cases restoring) public and professional confidence in the quality level of the schools.

A REFLECTION ON SCHOOL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

A final reflection on studies of school performance leaves me with the disturbing conclusion that in spite of remediation programs, students from poor families are still likely to achieve poorly. To explain away unsatisfactory achievement because of environmental factors beyond the control of schools is as immobilizing as explaining it away because of inherited physiological characteristics. Schools can and must give leadership to effecting racial and socio-economic heterogeneity. In the meantime there is a job to be done. Superintendent Carl Dolce reflects fairly accurately my sentiments in his discussions of the school as a delivery system that must produce. His questions are hard, but they require answers:

> What is happening to children? Not much! We have thrown out the crutches that educators have used for a long period of time. One of the crutches is large class size. Okay, we say, we will reduce class size, and then we are told, 'Well we don't have enough supplies and equipment.' So we pump in supplies and equipment, and now what we are getting is ,'Well, the problem is the community.'

> Where does the rationalization stop? And where, and at what point, are people expected to produce?[10]

What happens to students when recommendations of big city study teams are implemented is the one pervasive challenge that preempts all others, and one that frequently haunts me.

FOOTNOTES

1. Special Staff Organized by the Midwest Administration Center, Report: Cincinnati School Survey, Vol. I, and Supplementary Papers: Cincinnati School Survey, Vol. II, August, 1968.

2. The Ohio State University Advisory Commission on Problems Facing the Columbus Public Schools, A Report to the Columbus Board of Education, June 15, 1968.

3. The Detroit High School Study Commission, Report to the Board of Education, City of Detroit, June, 1968.

4. A. Harry Passow, Study Director, Toward Creating a Model Urban School System: A Study of the Washington, D. C. Public Schools, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York, September, 1967.

5. The Columbus study-team had less than 90 days to do its work and prepare the final report; one year was allocated to the Washington, D. C. team prior to a preliminary report; the Cincinnati team had one year; and the Detroit team issued a preliminary report within one year and eight months of its appoinment.

6. A study team that is not responsive to critical problems of the moment may lose any opportunity it otherwise could have for effecting change, and gaining consideration from the Board of Education and the citizens for implementing other recommendations, regardless of their value.

7. In March, 1967, the Philadelphia Board of Education released school-by-school results of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; at public urging, the Washington, D. C. school system released reading scores in April, 1967; the New York Board has made school-by-school achievement scores available to the public. (Education U.S.A., National School Public Relations Association, Washington, D. C., May 1, 1967).

8. Cincinnati School Survey, op cit., pp. 63-64.

9. James Coleman, Equality of Educational Opportunity, Wash., D. C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966.

10. Carl Dolce, commenting on "The Anatomy of Conflict: Mediators At The Focal Points of Conflict," in The Struggle For Power in The Public Schools, National Committee for Support of the Public Schools, 1968, pp. 59-62.